



**European Public Health Alliance – Environment Network (EEN)
Policy paper**

EU Climate Change and Health

May 2005 final

Introduction

Climate change is a major threat to human health. If the global emissions of greenhouse gases are not stabilised and subsequently reduced, health services will not be able to cope adequately with the health impacts of climate change. In the interest of human health, EEN will support all sustainable measures that reduce the production of greenhouse gases, promote the saving of energy, and mitigate the health effects of global warming.

EEN calls upon EU Governments, Ministers, the European Parliament and European Commission to:

- **Make the EU the most energy and resource efficient economy in the world**
- **Limit climate change and increase the use of clean energy**
- **Ensure the EU meets its Kyoto commitments and continues its international leadership on climate change**
- **Set further targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions in the EU, of at least 30% by 2020, and 80% by 2050.**
- **Phase out harmful subsidies**
- **Ensure proper implementation of the CO₂ Emissions Trading System**
- **The transport sector must address its negative impact:**
- **Support victims of climate change and poor countries transition towards a low carbon society**
- **Energy efficiency– realise the potential**
- **No nuclear power**
- **Increase the share of renewable energy**

Even if society substantially reduces its emissions of greenhouse gases over the coming decades, the climate system is projected to continue to change over the coming centuries. Therefore, society has to prepare for and adapt to the consequences of some inevitable climate change, in

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addition to mitigation measures. To prevent or limit severe damage to the environment, society and economies, adaptation strategies for affected systems are required, at European, national, regional and local level.¹ The health sector is not well-prepared for the effects of climate change as was highlighted during the heat wave in France in 2003 – much needs to be learnt and implemented from this experience and others.

EEN Overview

As a leading non-governmental organisation bringing together perspectives in public health such as those of medical and health professionals, representatives of women's organisations and experts on children's issues, EEN encourages attention to be given to four particular areas:

- An EU consultation process that affords a strong role to civil society. For example, a working group of the European Climate Change Programme on health impacts could be strongly involved in raising awareness as well as stimulating further policy thinking.
- A system of support for the development of new EU-wide networks specialising in climate change within existing networks of health specialists. Its members, representing doctors, nurses, women's networks and so on, can be involved in an ongoing process of identifying emerging threats, providing early warnings, supporting surveillance and organising crisis management.
- Additional resources for identifying the special needs of vulnerable groups, such as children, women, older people, and the poorest communities who are often the worst affected and the least prepared.
- Investment in communication about the health effects of climate change, including
 1. Awareness raising of the health consequences, e.g., deaths from dehydration during heat waves.
 2. Providing information to vulnerable groups about how to deal with the consequences of climate change, such as a flooded home and contaminated water supply, or on food preparation and storage to prevent food poisoning as temperatures rise.
 3. Ensuring education for public health experts and health professionals on how to respond to problems associated with emergencies, such as flooding and heat waves, and to those that are emerging slowly, such as vector-borne diseases (ticks, leishmaniasis, localised outbreaks of malaria), food poisonings associated with rising temperatures, etc.
 4. Advocating for stronger government action to address the root causes of climate change, e.g., need for transport policy changes that encourage cycling and walking and rail rather than air travel and the efficient use of energy and resources.

Detailed Response

EEN response to, Winning the Battle Against Global Climate Change (COM(2005) 35 final) on the issue of future adaptation policies necessary to protect the health of European Citizens recognises in this policy that:-

"the EU needs to include the following elements:

(6) The inclusion of adaptation policies: More resources need to be allocated in the EU to adapt effectively to climate change."

¹ Impacts of Europe's changing climate An indicator-based assessment EEA Report No 2/2004

the main policy that the Commission will implement in the EU would be

- *“More and better focussed research to addressing global and regional impacts, developing cost-effective adaptation and mitigation strategies,”*

and

“The role of the EU in reducing vulnerability and promoting adaptation should be explored with the involvement of the EU insurance industry.”

EEN fully supports the need for further research and the promotion of adaptation policies, however believes that our health services need to act and adapt now to ensure that Europe is prepared for the consequences of thermal stress, infectious disease, floods, impacts from storm damage and extreme weather, all of which are outlined in the Commissions proposal.

EEN remind the Commission of the commitments made under the 6th Environmental Action Programme ‘Environment 2010: Our Future, Our Choice’

3. In addition to the mitigation of climate change, the Community should prepare for measures aimed at adaptation to the consequences of climate change, by:

- **reviewing Community policies, in particular those relevant to climate change, so that adaptation is addressed adequately in investment decisions;**
- **encouraging regional climate modelling and assessments both to prepare regional adaptation measures such as water resources management, conservation of biodiversity, desertification, agriculture, spatial planning and flooding prevention and to support awareness raising among citizens and business.**

Unfortunately, therefore, it is not only the EU insurance industry that will bare the brunt of climate change it is Europe's citizens and in this regard the Health Care Community and Services. “These events will continue to pose additional challenges to current and future populations, in terms of health risk management and the reliability of infrastructure, including health services, power supply and others.” EEN calls upon the European Commission to ensure that all stakeholders are consulted in policies related to reducing vulnerability and promoting adaptation. EEN considers it essential that reducing vulnerability and promoting adaptation should be explored with the involvement of the Health Care Community.

The European Commission must “recognize that actions must be taken to reduce the current and future burden of disease due to extreme weather and climate events and to include the prevention of health effects due to weather and climate extremes among” the priorities of the Environment and Health Directorates in the Commission. To define the research mandate further EEN call upon the European Commission as a priority provide funds to “identify effective and efficient interventions, such as early warning systems, surveillance mechanisms and crisis management.” The mandate for this work is clearly laid out under the Treaties of the EU the objectives of which in the environmental context (Article 174) is to protect human health.

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The European Commission under agreement with WHO² agreed upon close cooperation of the follow up of the Budapest Conference³ in Environment and Health areas of co-operation to be strengthened and deepened. This notably includes extreme weather events, based on commitments, made by European Ministers for Health and Environment highlighted under public health response to extreme weather and climate events⁴. The European Commission has a role to play, under commitments made at the Environment and Health Ministerial Conference in Budapest 2004 in providing:-

- effective and timely coordination and collaboration among public health authorities, meteorological services and agencies (national and international), emergency response agencies and civil society in developing local, regional and national monitoring and surveillance systems for the rapid detection of extreme weather events and their effects on public health;
- developing civil emergency and intervention plans, including activities to prevent morbidity and mortality due to weather and climate extremes;
- improving public awareness of extreme weather events, including actions that can be taken at individual, local, national and international levels to reduce impacts.”

In order to achieve these objectives EEN encourages the European Commission:

- to develop guidelines for estimating the burden of disease due to weather and climate extremes in order that all EU policies are based on a more comprehensive health impact assessment;
- to develop indicators for intercountry and intracountry comparison and monitoring of progress, linked to an integrated environment and health monitoring system;
- to coordinate the development of new methods, including sentinel monitoring and surveillance systems,
- to mainstream gender related issues into all suggested activities,
- to provide timely information on the health impacts of weather and climate extremes at the European level;
- to develop and evaluate more effective and efficient interventions, such as early warning systems, to reduce negative impacts;
- to harmonize interventions across regions and countries to facilitate the sharing of data and lessons learnt. Awareness raising on health issues related to climate change is essential with examples of best and good practice.

Climate Action Network-Europe supports EEN on their requests.

²Conclusions of the Fourth High Level Meeting between the European Commission and the World Health Organization 2 July 2004, Brussels

³ Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health held in Budapest on 23-25 June 2004, with the theme of ‘The future for our children’

⁴ Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health Budapest, Hungary, 23 25 June 2004, Public health response to extreme weather and climate events, Working paper EUR/04/5046267/13 28 April 2004 ORIGINAL: English E EUR/04/5046267/13

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